"Crime Technology: The Future of Law Enforcement"
U.S. Senator Mike DeWine

Over 28,000 people were killed by firearms in the United States in the year 2000. While we all have read statistics like this many times, this statistic is more than a number. It represents over 28,000 lives – roughly the size of the population of Sandusky or Norwood – and over 28,000 families affected by gun violence.

The tragic Washington-area sniper attacks reminded us recently just how vital it is that law enforcement personnel have at their fingertips the most state-of-the-art crime-fighting technology. Because of advances in science and technology, ballistics experts were able to quickly link the serial shootings to the same gun. This clearly aided in the tracking and eventual capture of the shooters.

Quick and efficient access to information is crucial to solving and preventing crimes and protecting our communities. And, access to state-of-the-art technology means access to information. Whether it's matching fingerprints or DNA samples or bullets from a gun, law enforcement personnel -- police officers and prosecutors and scientists in crime labs -- all rely on technology to do their jobs.

America can no longer afford to fight 21st Century crime with 20th Century tools and technology. We owe it to local law enforcement to help give them all the practical tools they need to do their jobs. That is why I have offered and supported several federal legislative initiatives over the last decade to get crime-fighting technology into the hands of local law enforcement. We've created and helped to fund national computer databases that contain fingerprint, DNA, and ballistics information -- databases that local law enforcement in each state can access in real- time to compare evidence from crime scenes and investigations.

And now, in a similar effort, I recently joined Senator Herb Kohl of Wisconsin in cosponsoring S.3096, the Ballistics, Law Assistance, and Safety Technology Act. This new federal ballistics imaging legislation would expand an existing national ballistics database, which already uses technology to help match bullets and shell casings to crime scenes.

Currently, when a bullet and shell casing are retrieved from a crime scene, local law enforcement can send the evidence to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms for analysis. The spent bullet and the shell casing are placed in a device, which is hybrid of a microscope, computer, and digital camera. A digital photograph is taken of both the bullet and the shell casing, and the image is then analyzed by computer software.

The available computer technology can analyze the tiny marks on the bullet and the shell casing made by the firing pin or the barrel of the gun. The analysis of the digital image of those marks creates a picture that is distinct and unique to each firearm. These ballistic images are then catalogued and stored in a national computer database, which is part of the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN). This network has over 200 sites around the country, including 9 in Ohio, where law enforcement can enter and access ballistic images to compare spent bullets and cartridge cases found at local crime scenes. NIBIN's database now has roughly 840,000 ballistic images stored in it, linking thousands of crime scenes and generating nearly 12,000 matches.

S. 3096 would expand NIBIN's computer database to include ballistic images for all newly manufactured or imported firearms -- the approximately 4 million guns entering the market each year. Those new ballistic images would be provided to ATF for entry into the NIBIN system, while gun manufacturers would keep the purchasing information. Then, under our bill, if a shell casing or bullet were found at a crime scene and matched to an image from a newly manufactured gun, law enforcement would be able to trace that gun to its original purchaser. Such information can offer significant leads in criminal

cases.

This type of federal legislation is the kind of practical effort that helps law enforcement get the job done. Too often at the federal level, when we debate crime-fighting proposals, the rhetoric exceeds the reality. We end up focusing on things that don't matter, while ignoring practical solutions that local officials tell us work. That's why with any crime legislation, the first question I ask is this: Will this law help real-life police officers, criminal investigators, and lab analysts do their jobs? When it comes to better crime technology, the answer is always a resounding "yes!"

The reality is that criminals get guns. They shouldn't, but they do. And, though expanding national ballistic imaging will cost money and though it won't solve all crimes, this kind of technology is still a very sound investment, as it will generate substantial leads for law enforcement. It will help solve crimes and save lives.